Children’s Tracks: Children take part in land use planning

Registering “Children’s tracks” is a method for documenting how children use local areas in their leisure time, by registering usages on a map. Nature surroundings, sections of asphalt in central regions, streets, pedestrian- and bicycle paths and many other places are highlighted in the maps. These areas are used as playgrounds, to organise physical activities and as meeting places for children and young people. Registering Children’s Tracks aims to give children the possibility to take part in the land use planning – it’s about democracy and it’s about sustainability!

Issue
In Norway 85% of children live in crowded areas in growing central regions. High pressure on land is a threat to children’s informal play grounds. Land that children use for their play and outdoor activities have to be made visible, like other items of geographical information, in the planning process.

Application
Participants are primarily school children (11–12 years), the children’s teachers and teachers in the local kindergartens. The method is primarily arranged for children from 10 to 12 years of age. It presupposes a close cooperation between the school, where children are together during the day, and the planning or technical unit of the municipality, that is in charge of the maps, and where land use planning is ordinarily carried out, and the local schools and kindergartens. Children are not asked for more than they know from their own experience and the participating children are representing nobody else but themselves. Teachers do register the school’s and kindergarten’s use of land during the day time.

Innovation
Registrations are organized as team work and are based on children’s and young people’s own knowledge. Such knowledge is absolutely necessary to “ensure that the case is clarified as thoroughly as possible before any administrative decision is made.” (The Public Administration Act, § 17). The Registrations of children’s tracks are included in the national program of land use planning, called Arealis. It is approved by the Norwegian Data Directorate. Parents are always given the opportunity to decide whether they allow their child to participate or not.

Transferability
The method is in ordinary use on all levels - local, regional, and national. The good practice can easily be transferred to any region in the Baltic Sea area.

Norsk Form – an individual approach
Through a web based map from The Norwegian Mapping Authority the children in the school class may do registrations of their use of the local area. After a day with observations and research outdoor, they return to their computers, working individually with electronically plotting on the maps. The Vestfold model is a team worked based planning method, being integrated in the ordinary planning processes in the municipality. Norsk Form’s method is more like an individualized based method designed to fit in to ordinary learning processes in school and classes.